

Hamlet Soliloquies (3.8.10)_1

(1st soliloquy-- Act 1, Scene 2, lines 133-164,
Folger Edition)

INTRODUCTION:

At this point in the play, Hamlet is still mourning the death of his father, King Hamlet. The new king, and also Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, had just announced that he has taken Gertrude's hand in marriage. Gertrude is the former King's wife and Hamlet's mother. In the beginning of scene 2 Hamlet is questioned by Gertrude and Claudius as to why he is still wearing black and why he still seems gloomy. Claudius goes on to explain that all sons lose their fathers, and their fathers lose their fathers. He says that it is unmanly to mourn for too long and it is ultimately time wasted. Right before Hamlet's soliloquy, he agrees by the wishes of his uncle and his mother to not return to Wittenberg where he had been studying before his father's death. This soliloquy is in response to his disgust at his uncle and his mother, their "incestuous" marriage and the aftermath of his father's death. He questions his mother's loyalty by reminiscing how in love his parents were and how quickly his mother was to marry his uncle.

ANNOTATED SOLILOQUY:

HAMLET:

**O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed 135
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God, God,
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't, ah, fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature 140
Possess it merely.**

In this stanza, Hamlet is thinking about suicide when he has desires for his flesh to melt. He feels that suicide seems like a desirable way to live life in a painful world. However, Hamlet feels that the option of suicide is closed to him because it is forbidden by religion. He says that the "Everlasting" or God, has a law (canon) against killing one's self. Hamlet sees no point in living in this world anymore as it seems cruel and disgusting to him now.

**That it should come to this:
But two months dead, nay, not so much, not two,
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
That he might not between the winds of heaven 145
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on; and yet within a month--**

Even though Hamlet's father has died, he is still known to be a great king who is still remembered by all and his uncle has not lived up to his brother's ranking. Referring to Claudius as a "satyr" shows that Hamlet does not respect his uncle as a ruler and sees him as immoral and selfish. He is a "satyr" because like an animal, ignoring any moral code and just acting on his sexual desire and need for power. Hamlet comments that his father was always so good to his mother and that they loved one another, so for her to remarry so soon after his death, and marry his brother, is very disrespectful to him. The comparison of Claudius to a Satyr again focuses on the "lust" between Gertrude and Claudius, something that clearly disgusts Hamlet.

Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman-- 150

Hamlet comments that, as a woman, his mother is weak. She has too quickly given in to her sexual desires as well, and she disregards any moral obligation to her recently deceased husband or to Hamlet. This idea of "frailty" being synonymous with "woman" has its roots in Judeo/Christian theology that holds Eve responsible for giving in to the temptations of the devil/snake. Hamlet's accusation of "frailty" is an accusation against all human character and its weakness in avoiding temptation, whatever it might be. With regard to Gertrude, that temptation is one of the flesh, which is even more disturbing for a son to contemplate.

**A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body
Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she--
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourned longer-- married with my uncle,
155**

Hamlet is very moved by how fast his mother moved on. Hamlet says that some creature or animal would have mourned longer and had more respect for the dead than his mother did for his father. She went from grieving immensely for her late husband (Niobe, see below) to parading around with her new one... his brother. Hamlet is shocked and disgusted by his mother's actions and sudden, unreasonable change from mourning to remarrying.

**My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules.**

Hamlet does not see his uncle and never will see his uncle as a good king or father. He knows the truth, and he relates his uncle to his father as being as different, as he is to Hercules. Hamlet does not see his uncle as a courageous man, at all.

**Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes, 160
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.**

Again Hamlet is commenting on the speed with which his mother's tears have dried up and her eyes have turned to Claudius. However, it is also the first time that Hamlet describes Gertrude and Claudius' relationship as "incestuous." Gertrude only sees fulfillment in her bed by simply replacing Hamlet's father physically. But it is also at this point that Shakespeare uses a bit of foreshadowing when Hamlet states that "it cannot come to good."

But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

He truly feels no good will come out of the situation. Despite this deeply affecting his life, Hamlet must keep his feelings to himself, and knows he must not tell his mother nor her new husband (his uncle) about how he feels.

133. **sullied:** stained, defiled (alternate spellings are "sallied" and "solid")

136. **canon:** law

143. **that was to this:** i.e., that was, in comparison to this king (Claudius)

144. **Hyperion to a satyr:** i.e., like the sun god as compared to a goatlike satyr (a satyr is a goatlike creature that ignores

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moral and/or sexual restraint)

145. **might not be them:** would not allow

151. **or ere:** before

153. **Niobe:** In Greek mythology, Niobe, so grief-stricken at the loss of her children that she could not cease crying, was transformed into a stone from which water continually flowed.

154. **wants...reason:** lacks the ability to reason

158. **Hercules:** in Greek mythology, a hero of extraordinary strength and courage

160. **Had...eyes:** i.e., had stopped turning her eyes red

161. **post:** rush (as in riding a post-horse)

162. **incestuous:** Hamlet calls the marriage of his mother and his uncle "incestuous"—i.e., a violation of the laws against intercourse between close kin. Other members of the Danish court seem to see the marriage of Gertrude and Claudius as legal and legitimate. Debates about the incestuousness of a marriage between a widow and her dead husband's brother were heated in the 16th century (especially during the divorce trial of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon). The Bible gives conflicting commands about such marriages.

CONCLUSION:

Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, tries to explain that life still goes on even though his father has died. Claudius says, "But you have to remember, that your father lost his father, who lost his father before him, and every time, each son has had to mourn his father for a certain period" (modernized). However, it is not simply his father's death that troubles Hamlet, and we are made aware of that through Hamlet's soliloquy.

Hamlet sees his uncle-as-replacement as a cosmic joke. That a man described like a "satyr" can obtain the power and position of a Hyperion is in many ways earth shattering. The "unweeded garden" without the powerful King Hamlet around to spray the Weed-B-Gone, allows weeds like Claudius to grow unchecked. It is unfair and changes Hamlet's entire view of the world. How does one live in a world where such injustices are permitted to exist? This is Hamlet's initial philosophical challenge.

But he cannot share these thoughts with anyone.

(2nd soliloquy-- Act 1, Scene 5, lines 99-116, Folger Edition)

INTRODUCTION:

This soliloquy is spoken by Hamlet after what is believed to be King Hamlet's Ghost reveals to Hamlet how Claudius murdered Hamlet's father. Hamlet is completely overwhelmed by hate towards his uncle Claudius and vows to obey the ghost's wishes. Hamlet also expresses his anger towards his mother and how she remarried so quickly to a villain and the brother of her own husband.

ANNOTATED SOLILOQUY:

HAMLET:

**O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart! 100
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up.**

In these Lines Hamlet doesn't know whether he should look

to heaven or hell to help him understand the revelations of the ghost. And he calls upon his "sinews" or muscles/strength to keep holding him up so that he can deal with this news.

Remember thee?

**Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe.**

Hamlet states that he will remember the ghost and its wishes at all times, despite the distractions of the world.

Shakespeare's use of "globe" for head is an interesting allusion to the actual Globe Theatre in which this play was originally performed.

Remember thee?

**Yea, from the table of my memory 105
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain, 110
Unmix'd with baser matter.**

Hamlet also states that records or memories of any sort will no longer concern him. He will forget the "trivial" thoughts of the past, especially from his "youth," which is treated here as if it were a waste of time filled with nonsense and immature matters. What the ghost of his father has told him will be the only thing he will think of and use as the fuel for his actions. Everything else is now "baser matter" or inconsequential.

Yes, by heaven!

O most pernicious woman!

O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!

Now, even though the Ghost made it clear that his mother had nothing to do with the murder, Hamlet sees his mother as pernicious, which has an original definition of evil. His uncle is now a villain, and smiling at the same time.

My tables—meet it is I set it down

That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain; 115

At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark.

[He writes.]

So, uncle, there you are.

Claudius shows no signs that he committed a murder and he acts as if nothing ever happened. Hamlet is seen writing this down as if he could actually forget this. But what this does at the very beginning of the play is show that there are those who "act" in order to play a role that suits their goals.

Now to my word:

It is 'Adieu, adieu! Remember me.'

I have sworn't.

Hamlet clearly swears to remember the ghost's revelation and uphold avenging his father's murder!!!

104. **globe:** Hamlet perhaps gestures to his head. He may also be punning with the actual theater itself, in which this play was performed.

105. **table:** table-book or slate, used here metaphorically (Hamlet wants to wipe his memory clean, as one would erase a slate or table-book. Later [lines 114-16], he takes out actual "tables.")

106. **fond records:** foolish jottings (**records** accented on the second syllable)

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108. **youth and observation:** youthful observation
114. **meet it is:** it is appropriate that

CONCLUSION:

The importance of this soliloquy is twofold.

1. Hamlet has even more reason to be completely unnerved by the current events at Elsinore: his father's death and his mother's recent marriage to his uncle. The ghost's revelation is simply throwing fuel on an already hot and powerful fire.

2. We also now know that everything that Hamlet does is for the sole purpose of avenging his father's murder. The "table" of his memory is completely wiped clean, and the only thing that resides there is the notion of avenging his father. We know that the "antic disposition" is all an act, since he reveals that to Horatio and the others, but the audience knows why he is acting. Every encounter Hamlet has in the play, no matter the character, is fueled by the ghost's revelation and the current situation in Denmark. And we must not forget that.

(Monologue-- Act 2, Scene 2, lines 316-334, Folger Edition)

INTRODUCTION:

If you remember this scene from the movie, you also remember that R & G have just arrived at Elsinore in order to "spy" on Hamlet for the King and Queen. Hamlet of course realizes this, and calls them on it. They eventually admit that they were called for, but do not fully explain why. Hamlet realizes that his so called "friends" are being used against him. He is careful not to divulge his ultimate secret, but he does expose his thoughts to some degree.

At this point in the play, Hamlet's thoughts are more for the "audience" than they are directly for R & G. Hamlet begins to reflect upon what it means to be human. The knowledge of his father's murder, his treacherous "incestuous" uncle and his fickle mother have forced him to rethink the goodness in mankind. This again supports the running theme of "acting." Hamlet is certainly "acting" for just about everyone, including R, G, and the audience. The irony about all of Hamlet's "acting" is the fact that he isn't yet acting to avenge his father's "foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.31).

ANNOTATED SOLILOQUY:

HAMLET (speaking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern):

I will tell you why. So shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the King and Queen moults no feather.

The explanatory notes below clearly explain that Hamlet is aware of why they're here and that he will tell them about his feelings so that they can report back to the King and Queen. Hamlet knows they're spying, and they now know he knows. For now, the King and Queen do not know that R & G have been exposed.

I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed, it goes so heavily 320

He admits that he's lost all happiness or "mirth" but he

doesn't know why. He won't reveal too much. Of course, the easy answer is that his father has just died and his mother has very quickly remarried.

with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'er-hanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire—why, it appeareth nothing to me 325 than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.

Hamlet explains to R & G that even the earth, with its "excellent" sky adorned with the golden rays of the sun, is no longer beautiful to him. He sees it as a place "foul" and diseased. He is referring to the evil and disloyal nature of mankind that his uncle and mother have revealed to him. He cannot separate their actions and nature from the entire human race. Hamlet sees the entire "earth" defiled by their actions. However, Hamlet never tells R & G why he feels this way.

What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The 330 beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me—no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

Hamlet ends this game with R & G by shifting his thoughts to man. Again, Hamlet reveals only part of what he is thinking to R & G. He never refers to who might have inspired his new opinions. However, you must remember that these lines are also for the audience. The power of these lines exists in Hamlet's depiction of mankind. Hamlet praises mankind's:

*"reason" or ability to use the mind
"infinite...faculty" or unlimited potential
"form...admirable" or physical beauty
"action...like an angel" or mankind's benevolence
"apprehension...like a god" or man is like a god
"paragon...animals" or the model of excellence*

But none of these things matter to Hamlet anymore because he has realized that man is simply "dust," which is what we will all eventually become after death. See the explanatory note below. This paradox is very troubling for Hamlet, who now sees the wonders of mankind as meaningless.

316-17. **my anticipation...discovery:** my saying it first will keep you from having to reveal it
317-18. **your secrecy...molt no feather:** your promise of secrecy not be diminished
324. **fretted:** adorned
329. **express:** well framed
330. **apprehension:** understanding
332. **quintessence:** the very essence (The word is usually used to describe that which transcends the four earthly essences, but here is used ironically to describe mankind as, in essence, "dust"—made from dust to return to dust. See Genesis 2.7, 3.19.)

CONCLUSION:

His father's death and the relatively easy way that he was taken from Hamlet have caused him to reevaluate everything. Of course, Hamlet is the type of character that will always

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look deep into the soul of every situation. The actions of his uncle and mother, not to mention the obvious disloyalty of R & G, are now all shaping Hamlet's attitude and being.

This scene is important because it shows the audience that the actions of all individuals reflect the nature of all humanity. The audience now knows that Hamlet is not only concerned with avenging his father's murder. He returned from the university, where we can surmise he was probably very much into philosophy and other intellectual pursuits, to find his world turned upside-down. It is at this point that the play becomes something more than a revenge play. And that is the defining power of Hamlet, and the greatest expression of Shakespeare's genius!

I love it!

(3rd soliloquy-- Act 2, Scene 2, lines 99-116, Folger Edition)

INTRODUCTION:

The power of this scene is directly related to its context. The players have just come to Elsinore, and Hamlet is clearly a very big fan. It could be that he even performed with them when he was at college in Wittenberg. The importance of the players, along with everything else that is happening leading up to this soliloquy, is made evident by Hamlet's open line, "Now I am alone." The players have left Hamlet to get ready for their evening performance and his "friends" Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have also left Hamlet.

However, before leaving, the players performed a very brief enactment of a poem about the fall of Troy. King Priam of Troy is dead, and his wife, Hecuba, is mourning him. This mini-performance influences most of this soliloquy, and it is the players that show Hamlet how pathetic his non-action is.

ANNOTATED SOLILOQUY:

HAMLET:

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit

Now I am alone.

**O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit 580
That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!
For Hecuba! 585
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her?**

What is Hecuba to him (the actor) that can make the actor seem so visibly upset and emotional. It is all pretend, and the actor is only motivated by entertaining others.

**What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech, 590
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,**

**Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears.**

Hamlet imagines what the actor would do if he actually had a real reason to be upset and angry. Hamlet believes that if the players had reason to behave as he does, that they would amaze their audience.

**Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause, 595
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?**

Hamlet questions himself as the king's son. He calls himself a coward and hasn't made any plans for revenge for his poor father whose life was just taken by murder.

**Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face? 600
Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat,
As deep as to the lungs? who does me this?
Ha!
'Swounds, I should take it: for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-liver'd and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this 605
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal: bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!**

In the two lines above Hamlet is referring to his uncle who has no remorse for killing Hamlet's father and his own brother.

**O, vengeance! 610
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab, 615
A scullion!**

Here, Hamlet realizes he has done nothing, but curse and think about his father's death. Instead of action, Hamlet is a man of words. Instead of revenge, Hamlet has used thought against his uncle. Like a prostitute who pretends to "love," by using words, Hamlet is thinking and speaking of revenge, but he does not show his love for his father with action.

580-81. **Could...waned:** i.e., could work his soul into such accord with his thought that, from his soul's working on his body, his face grew pale
583-84. **his whole function...conceit:** i.e., all the bodily powers that express emotion responding with outward appearances to match his thoughts
591. **Make made...free:** i.e., madden guilty spectators and terrify those who are innocent
592. **amaze:** astound
594. **muddy-mettled:** dull spirited; **peak:** mope
595. **John-a-dreams:** a proverbial name for an absent-minded dreamer; **unpregnant of:** unfilled by, and therefore never to give birth (to action) \
598. **defeat:** overthrow
601-2. **gives me...lungs:** i.e., calls me an absolute liar
603. **'Swounds:** an oath, by Christ's wounds
606. **kites:** birds of prey
608. **kindless:** unnatural

611. **brave:** admirable
 615. **drab:** prostitute
 616. **scullion:** kitchen servant

CONCLUSION:

Hamlet expresses his struggle between revenge in this soliloquy. "Who calls me villain?" He questions whether he is going to be the victim of bullies. If he would let them call him names, strike him on the head, pull his beard out and throw it in his face. In this soliloquy, Shakespeare depicts Hamlet fighting with himself in many respects. Hamlet is eager yet fearful to avenge his father's murder, and is also unsure of the intentions of his father's ghost, that is, if the ghost is actually that of his deceased father.

The end of this soliloquy is important because it allows the viewers to learn Hamlet's formulation of a concrete plan, which was not yet disclosed prior to this point (below). The soliloquy also provides an insight into Hamlet's dueling and fickle tendencies/personalities, as seen in his flip flopping from one attitude to another, then his subsequent self loathing.

I have heard
 That guilty creatures sitting at a play
 Have by the very cunning of the scene
 Been struck so to the soul that presently 620
 They have proclaim'd their malefactions;
 For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
 With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
 Play something like the murder of my father
 Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks; 625
 I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,
 I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
 May be the devil: and the devil hath power
 To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy, 630
 As he is very potent with such spirits,
 Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds
 More relative than this: the play 's the thing
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

(4th soliloquy-- Act 3, Scene 1, lines 64-96, Folger Edition)

INTRODUCTION:

Before we see Hamlet's soliloquy we learn that Polonius and Claudius are looking to find out if Hamlet has actually gone crazy or is simply love crazy. They plan to send Ophelia to Hamlet and test his love for her. P & C plan to see his reaction to her. R & G are also involved in this plot, and are going to question and test Hamlet, due to orders from the king.

All of these issues are building a tremendous amount of frustration and despair inside of Hamlet. During this soliloquy, Hamlet is contemplating acting on his beliefs or wondering if death is a simpler way out.

ANNOTATED SOLILOQUY:

HAMLET:

**To be, or not to be: that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer 65
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,**

**And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks 70**

Hamlet begins to question whether it is better to be alive or dead. He wonders if it is nobler to put up with all of the bad fortune and luck that he is being faced with and suffer through without doing anything to stop it, or to fight all of his troubles and put an end to them all together. He then explains that dying is nothing but sleeping that ends all heart-ache and shocks that he would have to face on earth.

**That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
 To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, 75**

However, there is a catch, that in death's sleep no one knows what kind of dreams might come after us.

**Must give us pause: there's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life;
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
 The pangs of despised love, the law's delay, 80
 The insolence of office and the spurns
 That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
 When he himself might his quietus make
 With a bare bodkin?**

After all, who would put up with all life's humiliations—the abuse from superiors, the insults of arrogant men, the pangs of unrequited love, the inefficiency of the legal system, the rudeness of people in office, and the mistreatment good people have to take from bad—when you could simply take out your knife and call it quits?

**who would fardels bear,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life, 85
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of? 90
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
 And enterprises of great pith and moment
 With this regard their currents turn awry, 95
 And lose the name of action.**

Hamlet asks why anyone would want to deal with life's suffering, but those who are afraid of what comes after death. The only thing keeping him from death is what lies beyond death. The "dread of something after death, The undiscovered country from whose bourn No traveller returns, puzzles the will," and keeps people from choosing death as an answer. Hamlet states that our "conscience" keeps us from acting and makes us all "cowards."

73. **rub:** obstacle (a technical term from the game of bowls, where a "rub" is an obstruction that hinders or deflects the course of the bowl)

75. **shuffled off this mortal coil:** i.e., untangled ourselves from the flesh; also, detached ourselves from the turmoil of human affairs.

77. **makes calamity of so long life:** i.e., makes us put up

with unhappiness for such a long time
 80. **despised:** unrequited (accent on first syllable)
 81. **office:** i.e., those in office
 83. **his quietus make:** settle his own account (from *quietus est*, a legal term meaning "he is quit")
 84. **bare bodkin:** a mere dagger (or, an unsheathed dagger);
fardels: burdens, loads
 87. **undiscovered:** unexplored; **bourn:** frontier 88. **puzzles:** i.e., paralyzes
 91. **conscience:** i.e., knowledge, consciousness
 92. **native hue:** natural color
 93. **cast:** shade
 94. **pitch:** height (the pitch is the highest point in a falcon's flight); moment: importance
 95. **With this regard:** on this account; **their currents turn awry:** i.e., the great enterprises are like rivers that, turned aside from their main channels, lose momentum and become stagnant

CONCLUSION:

Hamlet faces multiple conflicts. Along with man vs self, where he decides whether living is the best thing for himself, he gives other reasons why he should not live. One major conflict Hamlet faces is man vs society. As he says here, "for who would bear the whips and scorn of time, the oppressors' wrong, the proud man's contumely, The pangs of despised, the law's delay, the insolence of office and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes." Hamlet is asking why anyone would want to deal with society's issues if it wasn't necessary.

In this way, this speech connects many of the play's main themes, including the idea of suicide and death, the difficulty of knowing the truth in a spiritually ambiguous universe, and the connection between thought and action. In addition to its crucial thematic content, this speech is important for what it reveals about the quality of Hamlet's mind. His deeply passionate nature is complemented by a relentlessly logical intellect, which works furiously to find a solution to his misery. He has turned to religion and found it inadequate to help him either kill himself or resolve to kill Claudius. Here, he turns to a logical philosophical inquiry and finds it equally frustrating (thanks Spare Notes...you really have taken the ability of our youth to think for themselves.)

(5th soliloquy-- Act 3, Scene 2, lines 419-32, Folger Edition)

INTRODUCTION:

In this scene the players perform a re-enactment of the murder of Hamlet's father. As Claudius watches the play his behavior becomes very strange and he ends up demanding more light. After the torches are lit Claudius leaves the room and he is followed by the audience of the play. Upon seeing the king's reaction Hamlet and Horatio agree that Claudius is guilty of his father's murder.

Then Hamlet is accusing Guildenstern of trying to play him like a musical instrument saying "o you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me." Polonius then comes to escort Hamlet to his mother but he refuses the offer and says he will go alone. The soliloquy takes place after Polonius leaves and it is here that Hamlet decides he will be honest with his mother when he sees her.

ANNOTATED SOLILOQUY:

Hamlet:

**'Tis now the very witching time of night,
 When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
 Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
 And do such bitter business as the day
 Would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother. 425**

Hamlet believes that the darkness of night makes him capable of something bitter, which is to deal with his mother after the Ghost's revelation is proven to be true by Claudius' reaction to the play. Night is always thought to be a time when we lose our inhibitions and do those things we would never be comfortable with in the light of day. He is in a vengeful state of mind and believes that it is the perfect time to do the evil act of brutally killing his uncle. He was once afraid that the ghost of his father was the devil and now he himself is acting like one by saying that hell is released.

**O, heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
 The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:
 Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
 I will speak daggers to her, but use none;**

Hamlet still shows some affection towards his mother but he is still extremely angry at her hasty marriage with the man who killed his father. He says that he won't hurt her physically but emotionally by using harsh words. He says that he won't cross the line like Nero did (see notes below).

My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites; 430

Hamlet is not willing to allow his tongue or words express what is really in his heart/soul. Therefore, they are hypocrites for not representing the same thing.

**How in my words soever she be shent,
 To give them seals never, my soul, consent!**

Again, Hamlet is willing to shame his mother with words, but is not willing to go further than that. His soul will never consent to anything more than words as "daggers."

427. **Nero:** murderer of his mother Agrippina
 431. **How...somever:** however, **shent:** punished
 432. **give them seals:** i.e., validate my words (by putting them into action)

CONCLUSION:

The power of this soliloquy is that it finally reveals a Hamlet ready for action. The play has proven to him that Claudius is guilty, and the time of night seems to provide Hamlet with a context for such an evil deed as murder. One is sure that at this point Hamlet will finally avenge his father's murder.

Kenneth Branagh's Hamlet

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YY0In0pWhFk>

Hamlet Soliloquies (3.8.10)_7

(6th soliloquy-- Act 3, Scene 3, lines 77-103, Folger Edition)

INTRODUCTION:

Before this soliloquy, Hamlet is on his way to see his mother in order to "speak daggers." As Hamlet is on his way he sees his uncle, King Claudius, upset and kneeling down and praying. Desiring revenge, Hamlet draws his sword. However, seeing his uncle praying quickly sparks another line of thought, which once again halts any type of action in this scene.

ANNOTATED SOLILOQUY:

Hamlet:

Now might I do it (pat,) now he is a-praying,
And now I'll do't: *[He draws his sword.]*
and so he goes to heaven,
And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd: 80
A villain kills my father; and, for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread, 85
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought,
'Tis heavy with him: and I then revenged,
To take him in the purging of his soul, 90
When he is fit and season'd for his passage?
No.
Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent:
[He sheathes his sword.]

Hamlet wishes that his Uncle die in a similar way to his father, "a more horrible occasion," than while praying.

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed, 95
At gaming, swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't:
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven
And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays: 100
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.
[Hamlet exits.]

Hamlet plans to catch his uncle in a fallacious act so as much as he wants to go to heaven, he will rightfully go to hell. This will be true revenge for Hamlet. Hamlet wants to see his uncle in a sinful act so he will go to hell. This will be the revenge Hamlet always longed for.

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80. **would be scanned:** i.e., needs to be examined
84. **hire and salary:** i.e., something Claudius should pay me for
85. **grossly, full of bread:** in the full enjoyment of the world (See Ezekiel 16.49: "Pride fullness of break, and abundance of idleness.")
87. **audit:** final account
89. **heavy with him:** i.e., his spirit is in a serious condition
90. **him:** i.e., Claudius
93. **know thou a more horrid hent:** i.e., wait for a more horrible occasion

100. **stays:** waits

101. **This physic:** this medicine (i.e., this postponement of the killing; or, Claudius's purging of himself through prayer)

CONCLUSION:

While at the beginning of this scene Hamlet was longing to kill his uncle, after this soliloquy, Hamlet convinces himself to hold off. He wishes that his uncle die the same type of death as his father, unexpected and horrid. This is exemplified in Hamlet's mentioning that his father died before he had the opportunity to repent for his sins. He doesn't want his uncle to go to heaven after praying, but to go to hell for incest and murder. This would be true revenge for Hamlet, or so he believes.

This scene is extremely important in understanding Hamlet. He does not want to kill just to kill. There is more meaning behind it. Hamlet wants revenge for his father's death as well as for "stealing" his mother away from him. Instead of killing Claudius now, by doing it when he is not expecting it as well as with clear intention shown to all, Hamlet plans to get the true revenge he longs for.

(7th soliloquy-- Act 4, Scene 4, lines 34-69, Folger Edition)

INTRODUCTION:

In this soliloquy, Hamlet is seen as incredibly indecisive about retaining his "honor." He is deciding whether to take action against his uncle and claims that any fight is worth it if one's honor and reputation is at stake. Also he comes to the realization that mankind acts so violently and dramatically for so little personal gain. This is inspired by the army that Hamlet witnesses in this scene. The entire soliloquy is given while an army is scene marching by, and it is this army of men that Hamlet refers to in the soliloquy.

ANNOTATED SOLILOQUY:

Hamlet:

How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man, 35
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
Here, Hamlet is stating that there is no worth in being a man without a purpose. In that humans have lost their animal/beast-like nature which he feels would have bettered them. Therefore, he too must act with purpose.

Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason 40
To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on the event,
(A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom
45
And ever three parts coward), I do not know
Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do;'
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me:
Witness this army of such mass and charge 50

Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death and danger dare, 55
Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake.

Hamlet seems to state that he does have the reason and cause to believe in what has happened. When he speaks of thinking too precisely on an event or of "Bestial oblivion," he refers to whatever it is that has caused his inaction. He now sees over-thinking as being 3/4 "coward" and 1/4 "wisdom." He now realizes that he has the motive and ability to act, so he must just as the men marching across the field are doing.

How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd, 60
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep? while, to my shame, I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot 65
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

Here Hamlet justifies his violent means. Hamlet feels it is in his name and honor, as well as being that he must avenge his father's death or he is nothing. The conclusion of this soliloquy flatly states that he finds himself to be nothing if he cannot complete that goal.

38-39. **discourse,...before and after:** power of thought that looks into the past and the future
41. **fust:** become moldy
42. **Bestial oblivion:** mindlessness like the beasts
42-43. **craven scruple / Of thinking:** cowardly hesitation that results from thinking
49. **gross as earth:** as evident as the earth itself
53. **Makes mouths at:** makes faces at (i.e., holds in contempt)
56-59. **Rightly...at the stake:** i.e., to be truly great, one should not fight except when the argument is itself great, unless honor is at risk **at the stake:** at risk (as in gambling)
64. **trick of fame:** illusion of honor
66. **Whereon...cause:** on which the numbers of fighting men do not have room to fight the battle
67-68. **Which is not...hide the slain:** which is not large enough to be a tomb or receptacle for those who will be killed **continent:** container

CONCLUSION:

Hamlet seems to be a dynamic character but he is merely acting out his craziness. By the end of the soliloquy, Hamlet brings to a halt his contemplation over the immoral act of murderous revenge, and finally accepts it as his necessary duty. Hamlet's 'reason,' the part of him that has been dominant and that has questioned the "honor" in murder and revenge throughout the play, this time does not counteract against his decision.

He wonders if his inaction is because he is too dull to act or too weak or overly moral. Furthermore, he questions his

honor. He states that it is right to examine thoroughly issues before acting upon them, but to not stir when "honor's" at stake is different. In a final rally of his strength of character, Hamlet reasons that many a soldier has gone to his death "for a fantasy," so he should not hesitate to revenge his father's death. At the end of the soliloquy Hamlet comes to the conclusion that all his thoughts from now on will be "bloody" and "violent" and if they are neither of the two, then these thoughts can be deemed "nothing worth" or useless.